

**RELS 283: Paul's Letters**  
**Rhodes College/Department of Religious Studies**  
**Spring 2008**

Instructor:

Patrick Gray  
Clough Hall 401-A; Office Hours: MW 8:30-10:00; and by appointment  
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Time/Place:

Section 01 (CRN 28517): TTh 8:00-9:15/Palmer 211  
Section 02 (CRN 28609): TTh 12:30-1:45/Clough 302

Course Description:

Paul, it has been argued, is the most influential writer in the history of western civilization. This course will examine Paul's life and teachings within the social, religious, philosophical, and literary contexts of the ancient Mediterranean world. We will read early Christian literature written by him, about him, and in his name, as well as more recent interpretations of his writings and legacy. What is Paul trying to say? How is he trying to say it? How would his contemporaries have understood him? In trying to answer these and other questions, we not only want to examine the specific themes and arguments finding expression in these letters; we also want to cultivate skills and strategies for interpreting these and other texts—ancient or modern, sacred or secular.

Required Texts:

Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (=NOAB), or some other edition/translation of the Bible  
J. Paul Sampley, ed., *Paul in the Greco-Roman World* (=Sampley)  
Wayne A. Meeks and John T. Fitzgerald, eds., *The Writings of St. Paul*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (=M+F)

Course Requirements:

*Class Participation:* Participating in class presupposes attendance and preparation. You must read all assigned texts. Brief in-class presentations and writing exercises will be required of all students. *Class participation will constitute 10% of your final grade.*

*Quizzes:* There will be six quizzes given over the course of the semester. They will not be announced ahead of time and they may not be made up if missed. Students may drop the lowest quiz score. *Quizzes will constitute 10% of your final grade.*

*Papers:* Students will write four papers. Due dates for these papers are listed below in the course schedule. The first three papers (3-5 typed pages each) consider aspects of Paul's cultural context as well as later interpretations of his writings. The fourth paper is a comparative analysis (7-8 typed pages) of a theme from one of Paul's letters. Detailed guidelines and topics will be discussed well in advance of the due dates. Late papers will be heavily penalized. *Together, these papers will constitute 40% of your final grade.*

*Mid-term Examination:* The mid-term will include both objective and essays sections. *This exam will constitute 20% of your final grade.*

*Final Examination:* The final will include both objective and essays sections. *The final exam will constitute 20% of your final grade.*

Course Schedule:

Jan 10 Course Introduction  
Jan 15 The Symbolic World of Early Christianity  
Meeks and Fitzgerald, "Introduction" (M+F xiii-xxviii)

- Jan 17 Paul's Cultural Contexts  
Sampley, "Introduction" (Sampley 1-15)
- Jan 22 Paul in the Greco-Roman World  
*Paper #1 due at class time*
- Jan 24 Luke's Portrait of Paul  
The Acts of the Apostles
- Jan 29 Ancient Epistolography: Reading Other People's Mail  
Philemon
- Jan 31 1 Corinthians  
Selections from Irenaeus ("Marcion"), Tertullian ("Marcion's Special Work"), Marcion ("Antitheses"), and Harnack ("Marcion's Starting Point") (M+F 284-90); Baur, "Hebraists, Hellenists, and Catholics" (M+F 399-408)
- Feb 5 1 Corinthians  
Theissen, "The Strong and the Weak in Corinth" (M+F 610-23)
- Feb 7 1 Corinthians
- Feb 12 1 Corinthians  
*Paper #2 due at class time*
- Feb 14 2 Corinthians
- Feb 19 Philippians
- Feb 21 Galatians  
Martyn, "Paul's Opponents in Galatia" (M+F 235-41); Luther, "Death to the Law" (M+F 379-90)
- Feb 26 Review for Mid-term  
*Paper #3a due at class time*
- Feb 28 Mid-term exam
- Mar 4 No Class—Spring Break
- Mar 6 No Class—Spring Break
- Mar 11 Romans  
Lampe, "The Roman Christians of Romans 16" (M+F 659-69)
- Mar 13 Romans  
Selections from Origen ("Human Works and Divine Judgment"), Ambrosiaster ("Adam's Sin and Ours"), Pelagius ("Faith, Grace, and Works"), Augustine ("On Grace and Free Will"), Theodoret of Cyrus ("Sin, Sex, and Death"), and Barth ("The New Man") (M+F 353-78, 390-93)
- Mar 18 Romans  
Selections from Origen ("Christians and the Governing Authorities"), Schelkle ("State and Church in the Patristic Exposition of Romans 13:1-7"), Parsons ("Romans 13 and Augustine's Political Thought"), Luther ("Submission and Resistance"), Mayhew ("Romans 13 and the Right of Revolution"), and Käsemann ("Principles of Interpretation of Romans 13") (M+F 539-86)  
*Paper #3b due at class time*
- Mar 20 No Class—Easter Recess
- Mar 25 Paul in Popular Culture
- Mar 27 1 Thessalonians  
Malherbe, "Paul: Hellenistic Philosopher or Christian Pastor?" (M+F 643-51)
- Apr 1 Deuteropauline Literature: The Question of Authenticity  
Nietzsche, "The First Christian" and "The Jewish Dysangelist" (M+F 408-14); Shaw, "The Monstrous Imposition upon Jesus" (M+F 415-419); Harnack, "The Founder of Christian Civilization" (M+F 419-24)  
*Paper #3c due at class time*
- Apr 3 2 Thessalonians
- Apr 8 Colossians  
*Paper topics (#4) to be introduced in class*
- Apr 10 Ephesians  
*Paper topics (#4) to be introduced in class*
- Apr 15 2 Timothy

- Apr 17 1 Timothy and Titus  
Bassler, "The Widows' Tale" (M+F 634-43)
- Apr 22 Paul in the Patristic Period  
Rensberger, "The Use of Paul's Letters in Second-Century Christianity" (M+F 341-51)
- Apr 24 Last Day of Class  
Review for Final Exam  
*Paper #4 due at class time*
- Final Exam: Section 01: 5:30 p.m. on Saturday, May 3, 2008  
Section 02: 8:30 a.m. on Tuesday, April 29, 2008

**RELS 283: Paul and His Letters**  
**Spring 2008**  
**Paper Guidelines**

**Paper #1 (4-5 pages; 5% of course grade)**

This paper aids students in their preparation for paper #4 (see below for a description of this longer paper). Students will summarize four of the individual chapters in J. P. Sampley, *Paul in the Greco-Roman World*. The due date for this essay is January 22.

**Paper #2 (2-3 pages; 5% of course grade)**

This paper requires students to consider an artist or author who has been influenced or inspired by Paul. Choose a painting or a poem and analyze the ways in which it directly or indirectly alludes to, interprets, quotes, reflects on, or (re)interprets some aspect of Paul the historical figure or Paul's writings. What has been added, emphasized, or deleted? How does the artist or poet understand Paul, and how is this understanding reflected in the work under consideration? The due date for this essay is February 12.

For paintings, hundreds of images are readily accessible (e.g., via Google image search). Some sites (e.g., [www.biblical-art.com](http://www.biblical-art.com)) organize paintings according to topic and biblical text.

For poems, students may choose from the following list:

W. S. Dipiero, "Near Damascus" [Acts 9]  
Thomas Merton, "St. Paul" [Acts 9]  
Dylan Thomas, "And death shall have no dominion" [Rom 6]  
Peter Kocan, "AIDS, Among Other Things" [Rom 6]  
Ben Jonson, "To Heaven" [Rom 7]  
Francis Quarles, "On a Feast" [1 Cor 5]  
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Forbearance" [1 Cor 13]  
Robert Frost, "Revelation" [1 Cor 14]  
Dane Gabriel Rossetti, "The Choice" [1 Cor 15]  
Alexander Pope, "Ode: The Dying Christian to his Soul" [1 Cor 15]  
John Milton, "Sonnet XIV" [2 Cor 5]  
Countee Cullen, "The Litany of the Dark People" [Phil 3]  
William Cowper, "Contentment" [Phil 4]  
William E. Brooks, "Pilate Remembers" [1 Tim 6]  
Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Crossing the Bar" [2 Tim 4]  
George Wither, "For a Poet" [Titus 1]

**Paper #3 (3-4 pages; 10% of course grade)**

Write a paper on one of the following topics (N.B.: Each topic has a different due date):

- a. Is Paul anti-semitic? Generate a thesis and write an essay on the topic of "Paul and Judaism." In your essay, you should respond in part to one or more of the essays in Part VII of Meeks and Fitzgerald, *The Writings of St. Paul* (by Daube, Visotzky, Boyarin, Segal, and Fredriksen). The due date for this essay is February 26.

- b. Generate a thesis and write an essay on the topic of “Paul and the Role of the State.” In your essay, you should respond in part to one or more of the essays in Part VIII of Meeks and Fitzgerald, *The Writings of St. Paul* (by Origen, Schelkle, Parsons, Luther, Mayhew, and Käsemann). The due date for this essay is March 18.
- c. Write an essay in which you address to the following question: To what extent is it appropriate to think of Paul as the founder of Christianity? In your essay, you should respond in part to one or more of the essays in Part VI of Meeks and Fitzgerald, *The Writings of St. Paul* (by Baur, Nietzsche, Shaw, Harnack, and Heitmüller). When someone claims that Paul was the founder of Christianity, what are they implying? What are their presuppositions? How are they defining their terms? On what evidence are they relying? The due date for this essay is April 1.

**Paper #4 (7-8 pages; 20% of course grade)**

This paper is a comparative analysis of a theme or concept from one of Paul’s letters. The aim is to cultivate an appreciation of Paul within his Greco-Roman context. In many ways, the moral teaching of early Christians resembled that of their non-Christian neighbors. Sometimes this happened consciously, sometimes not. Sometimes the similarities are genuine and deep, sometimes only apparent or superficial. Sometimes the similarities concern specific religious or philosophical ideas, while sometimes they concern more general topics or rhetorical strategies. There are of course many differences between Christians and pagans as well. By examining what non-Christians had to say on a given topic, we become better equipped to understand the various options open to the proverbial man in the street in the first-century Mediterranean. And since these common men and women were Paul’s missionary target audience, some of whom joined the churches he formed, getting to know their presuppositions also helps us to understand Paul’s objectives and assumptions.

In this paper, you will choose one document by a Greek or Roman writer from a list provided below. These writings touch upon topics also touched upon by Paul in one or more of his letters. As you read and re-read, digest the writing as completely as possible. Then go to Paul’s letters and read all of them with an eye open for places where similar themes or concepts appear. Sometimes Paul and, say, Cicero will sound like they are saying the same thing about a topic. At other points they will clearly be talking about the same topic but will voice opposing viewpoints. Sometimes they will go back and forth, agreeing in certain respects but disagreeing in others. Once you have gathered your comparative data, you will have to write it up in a paper. The paper may take different forms. For example, you may focus on ideas in Seneca’s essay on suicide and Paul’s ideas about death in a single letter. Or you may pick a specific aspect of Seneca’s essay and look at similar ideas from several Pauline writings. Your analysis, however, should move in the direction of going deep rather than going wide. The paper is not a long one but requires a lot of reading and re-reading prior to the writing stage. Students will briefly present their topics and initial findings a few weeks prior to handing in the paper.

Choices for this paper include:

- |                 |                                  |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Maximus of Tyre | (any of his individual essays)   |
| Soranus         | <i>Gynecology</i>                |
| Seneca          | “On Anger”                       |
|                 | “On Shortness of Life”           |
|                 | “On the Tranquility of the Soul” |
|                 | or other essays or letters       |

Dio Chrysostom	Oration 17, 48, or others
Lucian	“Demonax” “Nigrinus” “The Passing of Peregrinus” “Lover of Lies” “Dialogues of the Gods” “Dialogues of the Dead” “Hermotimus” “Toxaris” or other essays
Pseudo-Isocrates	“To Demoniacus”
Epictetus	(any of his individual essays)
Marcus Aurelius	selections from his <i>Meditations</i>
Plutarch	“On Listening to Lectures” “On Progress in Virtue” “On the Education of Children” “On Tranquility of Mind” “On Talkativeness” “On Brotherly Love” “On the Control of Anger” “On Curiosity” “On Exile” “How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend” “On Whether Virtue Can Be Taught” “The Virtues of Women”
Cicero	“On Friendship” or other essays or letters
Musonius Rufus	(any of his individual essays)
<i>Testament of Levi</i>	(or any of the <i>Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs</i> )
Philo	“On Drunkenness” “On the Posterity of Cain” “On the Confusion of Tongues” “On Providence” “Every Good Man is Free”
Josephus	<i>Life</i> <i>Against Apion</i>